

THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS

Outside is the new inside, and the sky really is the limit when enhancing open-air living spaces for patios and pools.

by Kristen Manieri

The ultimate room with a view, crafted from sitting groupings, lounging spots and poolside dining areas. This home was designed by Nasrallah Architecture, built by Maroon Fine Homes and furnished by Design Specifications.







THERE WAS A TIME WHEN HAVING A WELL-equipped swimming pool area meant plopping down an umbrella table and a couple of folding chairs. These days, accessorizing a Florida pool can involve a mini kitchen, an outdoor bar, an open-air game room, a fireplace and a flat-screen television.

Outdoors clearly has become the new indoors. Pool decks and patios that were once nothing more than unadorned slabs of concrete have become couch-potato dreamscapes featuring plumped up pillows and thickly upholstered couches. Living spaces inside the home are mirrored so closely that sometimes it's hard to tell which side of the sliding doors you're on. Which is exactly the point.

"Start creating an outdoor living space by being consistent inside and outside," says Phil Kean of Phil Kean Designs. "Link materials, colors and textures and make the spaces flow together. Create an outdoor living room by using furniture and accessories that look like they can go inside but have the durability to last outside – and don't be afraid to use rugs, cushions and pillows to pull it all together."

Adds Karen Kassik of Home Accessibilities by Karen Kassik: "There seems to be a common theme for outdoor living spaces – combining fire, water and a comfortable place to sit." She suggests designating separate areas for conversation, dining, gaming, cooking and drinking. "The size of the outdoor room varies with need, function and budget, the most opulent being a full duplication of indoor rooms recreated for outdoor use."

In that spirit, here's a blue-sky blueprint for turning the inside out and creating your personal through-the-looking-glass, open-air enclave.

A fire pit and rough stone design add rustic warmth to a luxurious summer kitchen and entertainment enclave (left) created by Phil Kean Designs. The cabana also includes a grill, a gas pizza oven, an ice-maker, a refrigerator, a sink and granite countertops. In some designs, the line between indoors and outdoors is all but erased (above). This home was built by Maroon Fine Homes and furnished by Neiman Interior Design.

FURNITURE

Fashion has migrated outdoors, and today's outdoor furnishings are a seamless blend of design and technology, old and new, with teak, iron, wicker and weather-resistant fabrics as pretty as anything you can have indoors.

Overstuffed sectionals and oversized clamshells, creatively shaped chaise lounges, and bars and bistros beg for company. These modern outdoor-seating ensembles bring living-room comfort and style outdoors and liven up the patio, lawn, deck, porch or garden.

"These days, we're seeing a lot of comfort pieces, such as oversized sectionals, double chaises, recliners and swivel rockers that give homeowners a panoramic view of their pool, lake and garden," says Janet Medlock of Fireplace & Verandah. "People are now using their outdoor spaces as primary living areas versus spending just an hour here and there by the pool or over dinner."



Color, comfort and durability are the watchwords for contemporary patio furnishings, and today's fabrics have got you covered. An abundant selection, including the new Sunbrella or Atrium lines, is available in sophisticated color schemes that have the same look and feel as interior fabrics. And they're as tough as they are fashionable, offering high-end elegance as well as the ability to withstand the Central Florida elements.

The beauty of the design is important, but so is its sustainability. Medlock suggests furniture that utilizes N-dura Resin, specifically developed for outdoor use and is all but impervious to the daily barrage of ultraviolet rays. The soft, pretty, Teflon-like quality of the fabric is so tempting that some homeowners have used it to reupholster their furniture indoors.

Signature outdoor fashion prints and fabrics are also used on aesthetically pleasing and stylish rugs, which can help ground your whole outdoor ensemble and refine the space. Modern choices made from earth-friendly bamboo and UV-protected, waterproof synthetics come in an array of colors and designs.

"This year's big color is apple green," says Medlock, who advises marrying earth-toned furnishings, such as wicker and teak, with bold, bright colors that make each piece pop. "There are a ton of beautiful blue hues to choose from,

A little splash of color, especially scarlet red, can enliven poolside views and give your outdoor space an instant facelift, especially if you coordinate new fabrics with vibrant blooms planted nearby. The cabana includes a kitchen, a bathroom and a TV room while the outdoor space boasts a built-in grill and outdoor dining area under an arbor of colorful bougainvillea. This home was designed and built by Phil Kean Designs.

too. And red is always a popular choice." In addition, she says, think about intermingling neutral soft-top cushions accessorized with throw pillows that can be easily switched up when you're ready for a patio mini-makeover.

And there's no reason not to mix modern outdoor furnishing with older materials. Teak and wicker age gracefully, even in the rain and sun. They require very little maintenance and cleaning, and their natural wooden hues are compatible with any color scheme.

"Trending shows people are looking for a little smaller scale, cleaner lines, transitional contemporary styling and a lot more color than we're typically accustomed to seeing," says Greg Donelson of Robb and Stucky. "For furniture, aluminum frames are great because they won't rust and they're light in weight, making it easy to change up your layout and move pieces around the patio and inside during really bad weather."

OUTDOOR KITCHEN & BARS

Kitchens are the heart of the home. So it only makes sense that high-end cooking spaces would follow in fashion's footsteps, heading outdoors to give old-school grilling a run for its money.

"What we're seeing more and more of now are specialty outdoor ovens, burners for woks, griddles, deep fryers, full-size refrigerators and serving stations that make it easier to do fancy umbrella drinks and cocktails," says Doug White, of Aggressive Appliance.

Today's luxury lanais are outfitted with the finest culinary gear and fashion accoutrements, such as commercial-quality gas ranges and cook tops, rotisserie systems, extra-deep burner boxes, stainless-steel sinks and cabinetry, wood-burning stoves, wet bars, granite countertops and, of course, refrigerators. Don't forget ice makers and beer dispensers: Aggressive Appliances is now selling more of the latter for outdoor kitchens than for indoor bars.

PHOTOS: (LEFT) HARVEY SMITH PHOTOGRAPHY; (RIGHT) COURTESY TUUCI; COURTESY SHADY LADY LIGHTING



SUMMER ENTERTAINING TIPS

1. Design entertainment areas that allow guests to choose among mingling, sitting and munching.
2. Create ambiance with outdoor party lighting and citronella candles to keep the bugs away.
3. During daytime parties, make sure to provide lots of shade in the form of awnings, umbrellas or canopies – and keep plenty of sunscreen on hand.
4. Choose light and easy dishes that are hydrating (fruits and salads) and won't spoil in the heat (cream-based dips).
5. Prevent everyone from congregating near one main food area by creating a variety of food stations. You can do this with beverages by strategically placing a few colorful beverage tubs packed with ice.

Ocean Master MAX Cantilever parasol by TUUCI (above) and Shady Lady lamp (below), both available at Apenberry's.



White advises doing some careful planning before installing a custom outdoor kitchen. “The cabinetry is something people have to really plan for, and it’s often custom-built on site,” he says, adding that a vent hood for the grill is absolutely mandatory to prevent annoying smoke.

White also suggests buying from a company that can service what it sells. “Outdoor kitchens tend to need a little more servicing because people are tougher on them,” he says. “And outdoors, you’re usually cooking greasier foods and such.”

You can make your life easier by forgoing removable propane tanks and locating the outdoor kitchen near an easily accessible gas line. Also, protect the kitchen area under a lanai or in a shaded area so the cook doesn’t swelter under a double

whammy of heat from the grill and the sun. For evening cook-outs, make sure the kitchen is well lit.

Since it’s easy to spend \$30,000 or more on an outdoor kitchen, homeowners should buy pieces specifically designed for outdoor use, such as refrigerators designed to withstand humidity.

And while you’re at it, don’t forget to toss the kitchen sink into the mix. Compared to some other open-air components, it’s a relatively inexpensive addition.

FIREPLACE/PIT

No need to let the party end when the sun goes down. A fireplace always seems to bring people closer and make conversations more intimate. Whether gas- or

wood-burning, a fireplace adds panache and becomes the central gathering place during those cool evening hours after dinner.

“Fireplaces are very cozy and promote wonderful conversation,” says Kassik. “A fire pit placed in the center of the conversation area with a built-in seat or foot rest is a terrific place to enjoy an evening.”

Keith Groninger of Groninger Homes suggests building your fireplace on the east side of your home. “The morning sun is nice before it gets too hot,” he says. “Then the house shades the area from exposure, making the east side more comfortable while other sides of the home are still feeling the hot afternoon or evening sun.”

When a full fireplace installation isn’t possible, Groninger suggests a fire pit, which can provide the same welcoming, magnetic appeal. “Arrange seating so the fire can be seen during conversations or mealtime, and don’t forget to enhance the mood with some soft background music,” he says.

ENTERTAINMENT SYSTEMS

When the great outdoors becomes a way of life, great audio-video entertainment can enhance the experience. Whether you enjoy groovy reggae tunes by day or laid-back jazz notes after dark, it’s time to bring the music outside. Today’s outdoor entertainment systems can emulate Mother Nature with components disguised as rocks, flowerpots and benches blending in with your décor.

“Outdoor surround sound can be easily hidden in your landscaping so you hear pleasing music all over your backyard without seeing ugly speakers,” says Brett Ogilvie of Innovative Home Theaters. Outdoor entertainment options range from simple weather-resistant speakers posing as garden rocks to home-theater ensembles with giant LCD screens and movie-style projectors.



Maximize use of your outdoor space by adding practical pieces like a bistro set (above), ideal for brunch overlooking the pool. This backyard makeover, designed by Home Accessibilities by Karen Kassik, also included a porch for entertaining, a guest cottage and a lily pond water feature winding down toward the lake. The new, inside-out look is epitomized by a fully-equipped gourmet kitchen (below) featuring the Fire Magic Ultimate Barbecue Grill, available at Ultimate Cooker.



“There are some incredible outdoor products coming onto the market in response to the outdoor living trend,” says Ogilvie. “I’ve seen waterproof high-definition TVs available for direct outdoor use by your pool, spa or summer kitchen that are great for watching sports and movies outside.”

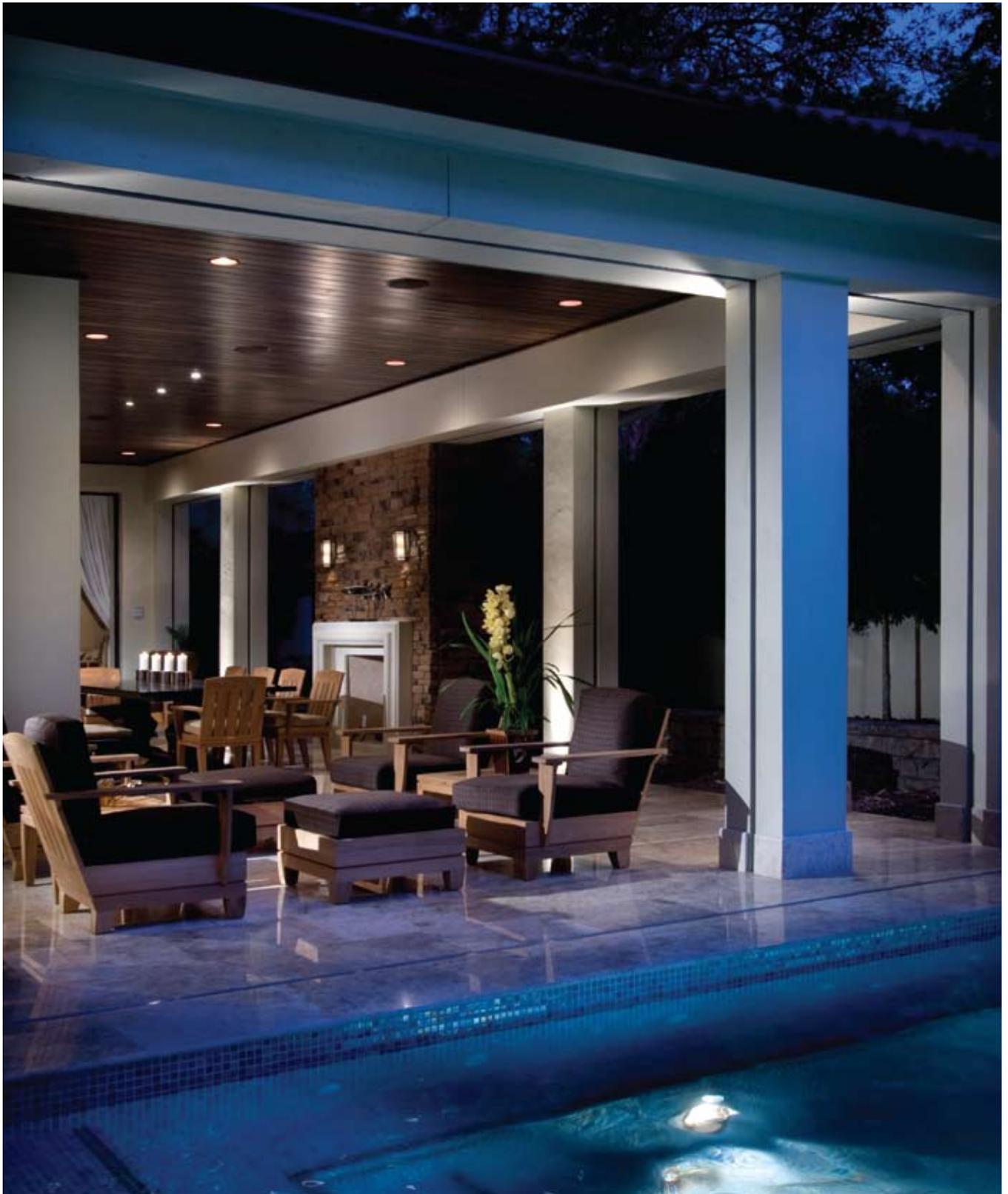
“Dive-in” movies are perfect for entertaining and keep the family by the pool all evening, tuning into underwater speakers and watching flicks on hidden movie screens that roll down at the touch of a button. Other outdoor entertainment options include iPod docking stations, satellite radio and hookups for gaming consoles.

DON'T FORGET

Fans and misting systems, either portable or permanently attached to structures, will significantly enhance your family’s comfort level on hot and humid summer days. Lighting is also key, and more diverse than ever. Use solar lighting in garden areas on your patio’s perimeter and install outdoor ceiling fans in sheltered areas to provide both overhead lighting and a steady breeze. Party lights strung along porches create a festive atmosphere. Outdoor lamps and candles lend intimacy. Candelabras and lanterns help set the mood after sunset.

Finally, don’t forget to install a ham-

PHOTOS: (TOP LEFT) HOME ACCESSIBILITIES BY KAREN KASSIK; (LEFT) FIRE MAGIC ULTIMATE BARBECUE GRILL FROM ULTIMATE COOKER; (RIGHT) MICHAEL LOWERY PHOTOGRAPHY



mock under a shady palm just far enough away from the action to provide a quiet reprieve for a nap.

After all the work you've done to create your amazing outdoor living space, you deserve it. ●

Varied lighting options such as candles and wall sconces create a cozy ambience in this outdoor living area, which is connected to the home's great room and master bedroom sitting area via pocketing glass doors. Retractable screens hold in 90 percent of the conditioned air, ensuring year-round comfort. The Ibiza was built by Phil Kean Designs and furnished by CRT Studio.